

O P 270038Z FEB 09
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO IMMEDIATE
INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 018262

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/FO, EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/23/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BK](#)

SUBJECT: Deputy Secretary Steinberg's meeting with
Bosnian Foreign Minister Sven Alkalaj on February 20, 2009

¶1. Classified by EUR Assistant Secretary Daniel Fried
for Reasons: 1.4 (b and d)

¶2. (U) February 20, 2009; 11:25-11:55 a.m.; Washington,
D.C., USA.

¶3. (U) Participants:

U.S.

Deputy Secretary Steinberg
EUR - DAS Stuart Jones
D Staff - Mary Sue Conaway
EUR/SCE - Mike Fooks (note taker)

Bosnia

Foreign Minister Sven Alkalaj
Chief of Staff Emina Merdan

¶4. (C) Summary. Deputy Secretary Steinberg and Bosnian
FM Sven Alkalaj discussed the situation in Bosnia and
need for greater U.S. engagement. Alkalaj pressed for
more senior U.S. attention and complained about Bosnian
Serb obstruction of EU required reforms. The Deputy
Secretary stressed continuing U.S. support for Bosnia
and its Euro-Atlantic aspirations and that we would
expect pragmatism and compromise from its political
leaders in return for deeper engagement. On a draft
constitutional amendment on Brcko, they agreed that
Brcko Arbitrator Roberts Owen's views would be
important. End Summary.

U.S. Engagement/Expectations

¶5. (C) The Deputy and FM Alkalaj agreed on the
importance of U.S. leadership in Bosnia and shared
concern over the direction Bosnia has been headed. The
Deputy indicated that the new Administration would
devote greater attention to Bosnia, but warned Alkalaj
that President Silajdzic should not mistake greater U.S.
attention as an opportunity to "dig in" on extremist
positions. As a condition for U.S. reengagement,
Silajdzic and others must approach issues in good faith
and work towards compromise. There are realities on the
ground, like the existence of the entities, which will
not change for the foreseeable future. Sustainable
solutions will require all ethnic groups to feel
protected. Alkalaj undertook to convey these messages
to Silajdzic.

EU integration, Serb Obstructionism and OHR

¶6. (C) Alkalaj's top foreign policy goals for Bosnia are
to complete visa liberalization with the EU and to
obtain EU candidacy status, but he blamed Bosnian Serbs
for blocking the required reforms, including 50 percent
of EU Partnership requirements. Alkalaj asserted that
Silajdzic is not seeking to undo Dayton or abolish the
RS, but that ethnic blocking mechanisms are preventing
Bosnia from becoming the strong, functional state

required for NATO and EU membership. Until those blockages are removed, the OHR will remain necessary to overcome Serb obstructionism. According to Alkalaj, OHR should not be an obstacle to Bosnia's achieving EU candidate status, which is a "political decision." The Deputy noted that U.S. policy is under review, but was inclined to agree that OHR closure is premature, and that OHR remains a useful tool for international engagement.

Prud/Nationalist Rhetoric

[17](#). (C) Alkalaj asserted that nationalism in Bosnia is tied to election cycles and that 2009, as an off year, presents a window for progress.

Brcko

[18](#). (C) Alkalaj indicated Silajdzic would support the draft Brcko constitutional amendment if Brcko Arbitrator Roberts Owen supported it. The Deputy welcomed Alkalaj's commitment to this cause.

CLINTON